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EFFECT OF THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES ON THE COST OF LIVING

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The high cost of living is one of the most vital problems of the day. It is a subject of more than passing notice. One cannot glance through a newspaper or a magazine, it seems, without encountering some article touching on it. The theories and arguments presented, while carefully compiled, prepared and written, are as different as the writers themselves. No two writers reach the same conclusion. All are endeavoring to point out just how, in their estimation, the matter can be brought to a satisfactory adjustment. In most articles the arguments are good and I have no doubt but that they help some readers solve the problem. It is not my intention in this article to differ from any of the theories advanced. It is rather my privilege to write upon a phase seldom referred to, but of great import nevertheless. I refer now to the very important factor of getting full weight and full measure for money expended. The high cost of living problem has been viewed from every angle but that mentioned. In all likelihood this was an oversight, as any intelligent person will readily grant that getting full value, instead of half or three-quarters, will have an effect of some kind on the finances of the home.

Prices of foodstuffs have gone up by leaps and bounds. It was thought three or four years ago that the limit had been reached, but today we know how utterly false that opinion was. It is quite unnecessary to mention here what articles have increased in cost. The list would be too lengthy. All have soared and are still soaring. One reason for this increase, to my mind, lies in the fact that package goods have supplanted goods sold in bulk. The new method is more expensive to the merchant and consumer alike, but the latter, of course, pays more in the end. Another fact lost sight of nowadays is that many consumers order by telephone and never see the goods delivered. Still others purchase haphazardly, asking for "about two pounds" of steak, when it would be just as easy and

far more satisfactory to say "I want two pounds of steak." The dealer then would not be so prone to charge for overweight. This throws an entirely different light on the subject.

My advice to the purchasing public is to watch carefully the weight or measure of goods bought. The results will surprise them. A proprietor of one of Atlantic City's leading hotels complained to me that he was being systematically victimized and robbed by his help and by merchants with whom he dealt. He was at a loss as to what course to pursue to bring about a change for the better. I suggested that he employ one whom he could trust to weigh all goods coming into the hotel and to check up all supplies. He acted on the suggestion and in one year effected a saving of twenty-five thousand dollars. A letter he wrote a short time ago stated that the plan was working admirably. If the housewife were to put her household on the same basis many dollars would be saved, which do not purchase anything now. It is unreasonable to suppose the savings would be as great as the hotel proprietor's, but they would reach a snug figure. After all is said and done, much depends on the attitude and vigilance of the consumer. If every effort is made to insure getting full weight and full measure, we are proceeding in the right direction and will get what we are after; but if these important details are slighted, losses and drains, where they can least be afforded, may be looked for.

Hucksters Should Be Watched

Many hucksters are wary and need careful watching. Their season is a short one, the goods they sell are perishable and they have to work quickly to realize on the money they have invested. Not very long ago two were apprehended in one of the leading cities of the state for selling a barrel of potatoes, which was just a half-bushel short. Their apprehension was brought about by the vigilance of the housewife. She watched the barrel being emptied and saw, when all the potatoes were out, that it contained a basket turned upside down. This trick is a favorite with hucksters and produce men, but they escape detection by operating quickly out of range of the buyer. In the instance cited, both peddlers made all kinds of promises if the woman would release them, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. They were arrested, arraigned in court and

fined one hundred dollars each, as well as being sentenced to jail for thirty days. Who can deny that such characters have had an effect on the high cost of living? They had been operating in the city where they were caught for one week, so that they had easily cleared the amount of fines imposed. But the jail sentence hurt. It will go a long way towards making them avoid this state in future. They learned much in court of the activities of the weights and measures officials of this state.

Hucksters claim to sell cheaper, but the apparent reduction is made up by giving short weight and short measure. Their field in this state is not nearly so fruitful now as it used to be, as city and county weight and measure superintendents intercept them wherever found and compel them to show their measures. If the measures have been sealed they are allowed to continue their operations; but if the measures have not been passed upon they are tested without further delay. More than one huckster has had occasion to regret the visit of the weights and measures man, as any equipment in use found short of standard is at once confiscated. This constant picking up of equipment found incorrect has a tendency to insure correct weight and measure to patrons, as in every instance confiscated apparatus must be replaced with standard equipment that has been sealed.

Even where equipment has been tested and sealed, no guarantee can be given that the purchaser is getting all that is coming. This fact is established by the following case: An Italian merchant had been using the so-called "bottomless" measures, which have been placed under the ban in this state because they can be manipulated. As it was his first offense and as he pleaded ignorance of the law, he was not prosecuted, suffering only the loss of the measure. He was advised to purchase cylindrical measures, as they are more satisfactory in every way. He acted on the suggestion and the measures were sealed. Imagine the surprise of the official when he called on the merchant a few weeks later and found him using the sealed measures in which had been cunningly placed two false bottoms, one in each measure. They had been nailed and enabled the operator to work very freely. Of course he was arrested and fined. He will not be so ready in the future to tamper with sealed equipment. This incident emphasizes the need of being constantly vigilant, as other merchants besides Italians had availed themselves of the same trickery.

What Public Opinion Did to One Dishonest Merchant

That public opinion is being gradually aroused is borne out by the following instance: One of our county superintendents was inspecting in one of the smaller towns of his county. He called on the proprietor of one of the few stores in the town and tested the weights and measures used. All were found satisfactory save one dry measure, which was found to be short. This fact was pointed out to the merchant, who became very sarcastic and showed in other ways that he bitterly resented anyone's "prying in his business," as he termed it. He stated that he had always used this measure and never had anyone complain of it. The superintendent retorted that he could not continue using it, as it contained a false bottom. The merchant felt that he was being discriminated against unjustly and appealed to several customers who had entered the store during the altercation. He showed them the measure and his action produced an effect entirely different from that he had calculated on. Those who had been dealing with him stopped and told others. The result was that his business fell off to such an extent that he was forced to sell out and leave town. The various women's organizations take a keen interest in weights and measures work, and have rendered valuable aid in the past.

Keeping Coal Dealers in Line

The aim of the department's officials at all times is to secure full weight and measure. This fact is especially kept in mind during the fall and winter months when the selling of coal is at its height. One of the requirements of our law is for coal dealers to deliver tickets stating how much coal is being sold with each delivery. This feature was an innovation and was not very cordially received, as it requires that the net weight sold must be marked legibly on the ticket. This is a great help to the purchaser as he knows just how much coal he is getting for his money. Furthermore, it proves of assistance to the superintendents when they intercept coal deliveries. This is the plan followed to determine whether or not the merchants are complying with the law, both as regards delivery ticket and giving the weight the ticket calls for. In connection with this statement it might not be amiss to mention one delivery intercepted

during January of this year. A widow, with five children, only one of whom was old enough to work, had ordered a ton of coal from a dealer and had paid \$6.25 before the coal was delivered. An assistant state superintendent saw the coal being delivered and asked the driver to let him see the delivery ticket. It called for one ton. The load was driven to one of our testing stations and weighed. The coal was then delivered after which the wagon was weighed by itself. The inspector found that the coal was short six hundred pounds on the ton. The driver at once telephoned the dealer and told him he was about to be arrested. The dealer decided to destroy the scale on which the coal had been weighed and caused it to be chopped into small pieces, hoping in this way to escape the consequences of his act. This, however, did not prevent a warrant being sworn out for his arrest. He was arraigned in court and, being wealthy, fought the case bitterly. The evidence was so overwhelming that he was convicted very speedily and received an unusually severe sentence—six months in jail and a fine of one thousand dollars. In addition, he was compelled to give the balance of weight of coal to the defrauded purchaser. The convicted man appealed the case to a higher court, but there is every reason to suppose that the verdict of the lower court will be sustained. The coal dealer will then have no other alternative but to begin serving his sentence. The case attracted wide attention in all parts of the state on account of its somewhat unusual features. It cannot be denied that the effect will be far-reaching, and that other coal dealers will hesitate about sending out coal short in weight. It seems to me as if the department is helping in the solving of the problem of reducing the cost of living by engaging in such work as has been outlined.

Watching Sale of Butter and Milk

These are only a few of the cases we have encountered. Many other instances could be cited of fraud and deception practiced on all sides, but adding to the list would serve no useful purpose. This article, though, would not be complete were I to omit mentioning a few other accomplishments, which have also played an important part in relieving the burden of the housewife. Chief among the reforms inaugurated must be mentioned that brought about in the

sale of butter. This commodity was sold in prints which were supposed to contain a half-pound, pound and two pounds, but there was no weight marked. The merchant always sold a "print" of butter, not a half-pound or a pound. This led to an investigation. The so-called "prints" were purchased in all the larger cities. They were subjected to a thorough test and it may surprise the reader to learn that 85 per cent of the number tested were found short in weight from one-quarter of an ounce to two ounces. This shortage was entirely too great with butter selling at for from 45 to 60 cents a "print." The net result of our investigation was the promulgation of a ruling which compelled butter packers to mark clearly on the outside of the wrapper or carton the net weight in pounds or ounces of the butter within. This enabled purchasers to determine just what they were paying for and getting. It is an excellent ruling and has worked out very satisfactorily for the consumer. The packers were at first disposed to evade the law, claiming that it was too drastic and complying with it would be a hardship upon them. They further contended that butter would shrink or evaporate, which is true. But it would not shrink as much as they claimed it would. Some packers were also desirous of printing the words "when packed" on the carton or wrapper, but we would not accede to this request as it would have enabled the packers to evade the ruling. As above stated, the ruling has worked out very satisfactorily and has saved consumers of the commodity thousands of dollars by securing for them full weight.

Good work was also done in the sale of milk. The bottles formerly used in New Jersey were of all sizes. Thousands were found short of the capacity claimed for them. To remedy this a law was enacted which provided that, beginning November 1, 1912, bottles be only of standard capacities and must also have the capacities blown in the bottle. The law further provides that bottle manufacturers must use a designating number to be furnished by this department. This number is known to all superintendents and enables them to recognize readily just what firm made the bottles. If they are found short of the capacity prosecution is thus made easier. Those who violate the law would incur a fine of five hundred dollars. Since the law has been effective there have been no prosecutions. This would indicate that bottles now contain full measure, as they are tested by the officials at frequent intervals.

Other Crusades and Reforms

Probably the most far-reaching crusade was that conducted against the use of liquid measures for dry. Many merchants used liquid measures exclusively for the sale of winter beans, peas, cranberries, etc., instead of dry measures. This meant that the consumers were being given short measure, as the liquid quart is almost ten cubic inches shorter than the dry quart. The difference may not seem so much in itself, but it should be borne in mind that the merchant uses these measures many times in the day, six days in the week and fifty-two weeks in the year. The shortage in this time would reach a surprisingly high figure in dollars and cents if it could be computed. Over seven thousand liquid measures were confiscated last year. Those found using them now are brought in court and fined ten dollars. No excuses are accepted. The inflicting of a penalty will do more to bring about compliance with the law than any other method known. Today, the grocer or butcher using a liquid measure for a dry cannot be located in New Jersey. This may seem like exaggeration, but it is not. Standard measures are in use everywhere. The substitution means something in favor of the housewife, though she may not be aware of the fact.

Much could be written about the various pieces of equipment confiscated in New Jersey. They have attracted wide attention wherever exhibited. Requests have reached us from many of the Western States, asking for the loan of equipment for purposes of display. The department conducted an exhibit of confiscated standards last year at the inter-state fair, held annually in Trenton. The display contained over ten thousand different pieces and was a source of wonder to one hundred thousand persons who stopped and witnessed demonstrations of how the public was defrauded. The department is always striving to interest the housewife. She does the buying for the home and we have been trying to show her how she can buy more economically. Literature containing useful hints is distributed gratis. There were over twenty thousand requests last year for copies of our pamphlet, "What Every Housewife Should Know"—a very forcible illustration of the fact that people are waking up. Furthermore, many homes have been provided with an accurate family scale on which are weighed all purchases. This brings home to the various merchants the fact that they must be

careful when weighing. The investment in purchasing a scale is a good one and it pays for itself in a short time. But to get back to some of the equipment confiscated. Scales were found with pieces of lead, fat, putty, soap, etc., weighing from two to five ounces, concealed underneath the pan of scale. This foreign matter on scales always caused a corresponding reduction in weight of articles purchased. Five hundred scales, "doctored" in this manner, were found in use in New Jersey. These facts would be hard to believe if we did not have the evidence.

Thousands of weights were found in use short from one-half an ounce to six ounces. They were confiscated and replaced by correct ones. Does not this help the consumer? Most assuredly it does. Then, too, baskets used for the sale of fruits and vegetables were of every known size and shape, but they were always sold by the "basket." No capacity was mentioned, but the consumer was always under the impression he was paying for and getting half-bushel baskets, when in reality, he was buying from baskets holding but twelve to fourteen quarts—a difference of from two to four quarts in favor of the dealer. Even in quart berry boxes fraud was practiced, as the boxes represented as quarts rarely held the capacity claimed for them. All this confusion will be done away with after November 1. A law becomes effective at that time which will standardize baskets and boxes used for sale of berries, fruits and vegetables. This law, when it becomes operative, will, for the first time in the history of the state, insure consumers getting full value for their money when buying the products mentioned.

In conclusion I think I am justified in saying that the formation of the department has had a most wholesome effect on the cost of living. It has secured full weight and full measure for consumers throughout the state. It has made money go further than before. Enough has been shown, I think, to convince the most skeptical that the work of the department has had a most beneficial effect. We are not quite two years old yet and we have attained excellent results. We shall labor just as valiantly in the future as in the past with the hope that our efforts will ease the burden of all.